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**Innovative apple grower
George Lamont promotes
least-risk strategies,
wins IPM award**

ALBION, NY: George Lamont's best new idea in apple growing is one he can't sell other growers on. But it's cut his herbicide bill "drastically," he says. He hit on the idea about 10 years ago, after he pushed a probe into his soil to test for nutrient content.

"The soil came up looking like beach sand," Lamont says. "There wasn't any organic matter."

Organic matter is the soul of soil, so Lamont quit applying soil sterilant herbicides, changed how he applied his fertilizer-and took an "if you can't fight 'em, join 'em" approach to managing weeds. His comrade-in-arms: chickweed, a common weed everywhere crops (and lawns) are grown.

The chickweed helps suppress other weeds, and now a thick carpet of organic matter covers the soil beneath Lamont's trees. Lamont's 500 acres of orchards produce about 400,000 bushels of apples each year and are located near Albion, NY.

This and other innovations-and his proactive work promoting best management practices to other growers-have earned Lamont an "Excellence in IPM Award" from the New York State Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program at Cornell University. IPM develops and demonstrates least-risk methods of dealing with insects, weeds, and plant diseases.

Lamont was among the first fruit growers to use a novel method, developed by Cornell University IPM scientists, which helps manage the red mites that can plague orchards. These tiny, leaf-eating relatives of spiders weaken trees, reducing fruit yields and quality.

A pest management consultant helped Lamont find a different mite with the scientific nickname *T. pyri*. This mite is hardly bigger than the red mite, but that morsel is among the top items on its menu. They located the efficient little predator on suckers that had sprouted from a nearby grower's trees.

Lamont cut the suckers-thousands of them-and placed them among the branches of trees where red mite populations were high. "Those suckers would have to have been pruned out anyway," Lamont says. Within a month or two he had a self-sustaining control measure in place at little cost.

Deborah Breth, IPM team leader for Cornell Cooperative Extension's Lake Ontario Fruit Team, credits Lamont for his part in many research trials. "George has helped scientists test new, biologically based 'insect growth regulators' and other 'soft' control methods for leafrollers and other major fruit pests," Breth says.

Pictures are linked to hi-res scans



George Lamont

Insect growth regulators are considered very safe-to nontarget organisms such as those predatory *T. pyri*, and to birds, fish, and frogs, as well as to people and other mammals. These growth regulators work by mimicking a larval insect's own hormones, tricking it into an early molt that stops it dead in its tracks.

Yet when growers first tried an insect growth regulator and it failed, many blamed the product, recalls James Misiti, president of JM Scouting Service.

"What we didn't know was that our application timing was off," Misiti says. "While most of us cursed the product, George worked with the company that sold it. After two years of trials, they finally learned how to make it work."

Now, Misiti says, "these growth regulators are the standard." Misiti commends Lamont for the nerve to risk a substantial percentage of his crop to test new techniques.

Lamont, former Executive Secretary of the New York State Horticultural Society, receives his award on February 13 at the New York State Fruit and Vegetable Expo in Syracuse, NY.

For information about the New York State IPM Program, see <http://www.nysipm.cornell.edu>.

For more about the NYS Fruit and Vegetable Expo, being held Feb. 13-16, see <http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/hort/expo/>

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